

# The Beatitudes of Christ

A STUDY OF

## The Way of the Blessed Life

Howard Agnew Johnston



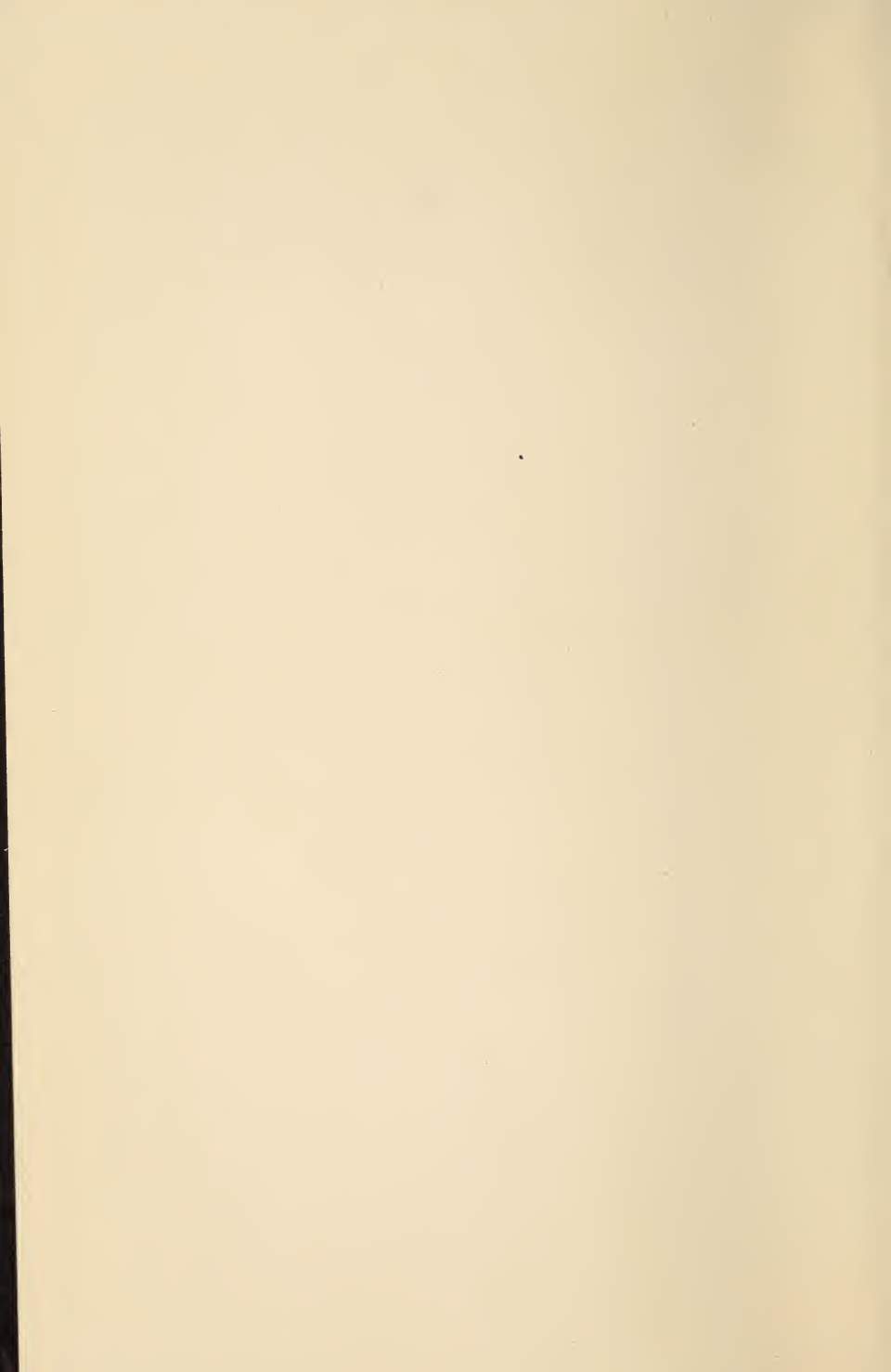
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By

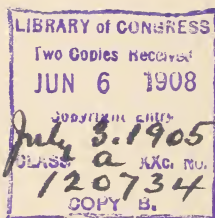
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*To My Daughter Mary*



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# The Way of the Blessed Life



# The Beatitudes of Christ

## CHAPTER I

### *The Way of the Blessed Life*

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life."—*John 14:6.*

The Beatitudes are the laws of life and health to the human spirit. They embody the basal principles of true being, and therefore they point the way to the truly blessed life for men. It was a weary and burdened and sorrowing world to which Jesus of Nazareth came. Men were striving for that one thing for which every man strives—to find satisfaction for his hungry soul. The pathos of human history is in the story of the manifold efforts of men, in the pursuit of happiness, to seek to satisfy the spirit in the realm of the flesh, to seek to fill the aspirations for higher things on the level of

the lower. Had you asked men how to be happy, how to live the blessed life, they would have told you, as many will to-day, to get what you want. Their first conception of the man who is blessed is that he is *having* what he desires.

It was a real shock to men then, as it is to-day, when Jesus pointed out the utter folly of such a conception of life. He pointed them to the fundamental truth that the only real happiness is, not in having, but in being. To the Samaritan He said: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4: 13-14). The secret of joy is not in position, but in disposition. The vital question is not Where? but What? Paul sings in a dungeon; Belshazzar trembles in a royal banquet hall. Victory is not found in the change of circumstances, but in the change of heart.

The Beatitudes must not be studied apart from their context. That setting binds them to the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, the very keynote of which is the fact that God is our heavenly Father. It is quite inadequate to speak of the Beatitudes as the highest ethics, as legalism lifted into the spiritual atmosphere. For we have here the teachings of religion. The whole movement of the thought of Christ centers in our personal relation to God. To ignore that is not only poor exegesis, but also robs us of the richest meaning of the teaching itself. We believe this will be made plain as we proceed with our study. Christ here gives us the full octave of the elements which constitute the true spiritual life of the child of God. Christ did not for one moment give His disciples reason to suppose that they could ever attain to this blessed life apart from Himself as their Saviour and Lord. The law of the kingdom of heaven finds obedience and unfolding only for one who has first entered that kingdom. Jesus

Christ Himself was the incarnation of the blessed life, and only in Him may any man possess it to the full.

We know that religion is a re-binding. Men were separated from God and from one another, as many are now. It was His purpose to make Christianity a genuine re-binding, to reveal to men, and in men, the true and blessed relationships between God and man, and man and man. He lived it all before men, and as we study these Beatitudes we must do so in all the light of the Christ-life, not only as He lived it then, but as He lives it unto this day with an ever-increasing power in the life of the race. Everywhere men are coming to see with clearer vision that Christ hath spoken the words of eternal life. Christ is proving to be the way to God because He has put the truth into the life, not only in His earthly ministry, but in His age-long working in the lives of men who have learned of Him the way of the blessed life. It is as men have come thus to learn Christ and to live Christ that light dispels the darkness,



and the solution of the problems that throng thick in the pathway of human progress is made plain.

We know that any teacher's power is primarily in the fact that he possesses an experience out of which he instructs, inspires and guides his pupils. Christ does not speak as if His authority came from an outside source. He does not argue, but simply states the truth, and every honest heart knows the statement to be true. His words are not arbitrary, but we realize in them these laws of our very being. Jesus speaks as a witness to the realities of spiritual life which we verify in our own experience. His teaching meets every man's need, and its effects are the healthiest and most blessed in every obedient life. The people who heard Him felt all this. We must remember that they had a religious past which the devout among them knew sufficiently to prepare them somewhat to receive this message from the Master.

He Himself walked in this way step by step to the end. It is perfectly ap-

parent that we shall only discover the secret of growing into the knowledge and fellowship of Christ as we see that He has pointed out the way. Some one has said this growth is like the climbing of the pyramid; as you go higher you also press nearer the center. It must be noted that each step is a necessary one in the pathway. The attempt to realize the third or fourth in the list, without reaching them through the first and the second, will be in vain. Indeed, just here is the explanation of the unsatisfied multitudes who have taken the name of Christ. They wonder why they are not happy in their religion. It is because they have not yet learned the way as the Master reveals it.

The first four Beatitudes deal with the inner life as involving our relation to God as our Father. The second four unfold the consequent experiences we shall have in relation to our fellow-men. First the principles of true being, then the graces which reveal those principles dominant in the soul. First

Christ in the heart, then a Christ-life so manifest that men will know who is King on the throne. Mrs. Browning asked Charles Kingsley what was the secret of his life. He replied: "I have had a friend." As Christ touched the unstable and self-sufficient Simon until he became a rock, as He touched Saul of Tarsus until he became the mighty Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles, so He would fain touch our lives until we shall know the joy of His fellowship, in all the way of His leading, past the discipline of the cross, even unto the crown. He stands at the gateway of these steps in the blessed life, saying to men: "This is the way: walk ye in it."

We have heard the shallow statement of some that they do not care for creeds and dogmas, and that [the Sermon on the Mount, which is an elaboration of the teaching in the Beatitudes, is sufficient for their religion. Their utter failure to realize the true character of these teachings is betrayed in the remark. No man's ideals are

worth considering unless there be truth in them which leads to the power to grow toward them. He who does not see the truth of Christ, which is the life of Christ, shining here, has failed to recognize the nature of spiritual reality, and has betrayed the weakness of attempting to justify his failure by an impossible subterfuge. The Beatitudes, without a faith in the Saviour who possesses all-conquering power, must be the despair of every human soul.

The word translated "blessed" in the passage is a plural of excellence, literally signifying the manifold blessings of the life which is herein described. Its root meaning indicates a greatness which the Greeks associated with outward prosperity and large influence. It was frequently applied to the gods, but had no special moral significance. The gods were blessed because of their power rather than their holiness. Mr. Gladstone has said: "In general the chief note of deity with Homer is emancipation from the restraints of moral law. As compared with men, in

conduct, they are generally characterized by superior force and intellect, but inferior morality." Among the philosophers the word carried some moral significance; but the Greek mind had no such conception of sin as that taught in the Scriptures. The Bible, in this instance as in so many, clothed the word with a distinctively spiritual significance. Perhaps the inner thought attaching to the word in the Scriptures is that of a state of life marked by the favor of God. At times this was seen in material prosperity. But Christ put upon it the peculiar meaning of a quality of character which grows out of fellowship with God in holy living.

The record of the life of Christ was marked by nothing more than by the fact that He was ever blessing men. To come within the reach of His touch was to receive a blessing. To understand the secret of His truth was to see light on all the problems of life. And to this day the same thing remains true: Christ is the perennial source of blessings for men. He gave all men to

feel that His power to bless was explained only by the fact that it is the power of God. Therefore, as He points men to the way of the blessed life, He does it by giving the laws of the kingdom of God to be received and lived in the earth. The Beatitudes are not in accord with the world's ideas, but they bespeak the potencies of God Himself by which to transform human life and lift it to the plane where the laws of God will be recognized as revealing the only way of abiding blessings for men.

Many will point to these high ideals and say it is impossible for us to realize them in our own lives in our time. There may come a day, they admit, when the dream may be made real; but now it is unattainable. But Jesus Christ did not so intend His teaching to be set aside by men. We may not perfectly attain, as Paul did not; but we may and must "follow after," set our purposes upon, strive with unabated zeal to realize this life here and now. It is a practical programme, nay, the



only possible programme, for the true child of God to-day and every day.

The final argument for Christianity is in the certainty of personal experience. Here the undeniable reality of the salvation which Jesus Christ has brought to men is known. Let a man once prove the power of God to transform his life, and nothing more need be said to him in the way of evidence of the truth of the teaching of Jesus. The Beatitudes challenge men to make this thorough test in the personal life. Their promises add inspiration to the challenge for every honest man who actually desires to know, not in theory, but in experience, the reality of a satisfied and victorious life. A man's inability to appreciate the truth about Jesus Christ in our time must be understood as having no reflection whatever upon His transcendent character, and in nowise affecting His claim upon men. When a man announces that Shakespeare does not appeal to him, that he quite fails to see the validity of the claim made for the great master



poet, no one thinks of arguing that Shakespeare is therefore not the real master that he is known to be. Every one just pities the man who is unable to appreciate Shakespeare. Or if one claiming to be a student of music affirmed that he much preferred rag-time music to the symphonies of Beethoven, no intelligent musician thinks for a moment of questioning the great master's conceded place. Every one is sorry for the uneducated novice with his perverted taste. This is exactly what we must realize as true of Christ. He has been proved the world's hope and only Saviour.

Let us understand, therefore, that the place of Christ as the world's greatest teacher in religion is secure. He has given to men the teaching which has proved the world's light. It is the philosophy of victorious living for men. In these Beatitudes this philosophy is presented. It reaches to the very depths of spiritual being, giving man the vision of the divine life in Christ, and guiding men into that life, as they

are willing to follow their Saviour in the way He has led. To all men He ever says: "This is the way: walk ye in it." In that way the light dispels the shadows. In that way there is surcease for sorrow. That way leads out of trials into triumph, out of griefs into glory, out of self into God. It is the way everlasting, which grows bright and brighter unto the perfect day.



Blessed are the Poor in Spirit



## CHAPTER II

### *Blessed are the Poor in Spirit*

"Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."—*Matt. 5:3.*

The first Beatitude is the only entrance into the way of the blessed life. Nothing is more vital to the human soul than to realize that unless one shall enter by this gateway, no true progress or growth can be made into the fellowship of God in Christ. This is the key that unlocks the first entrance into the palace of the King. This is the foundation on which all other true graces must be builded. This begins at the root of the matter, and cuts down the life of self to the place of utter nothingness. Men have tried to enter by some other way, have thought to cultivate some other of the graces enumerated upon this beautiful string of pearls, have imagined it would

not be necessary to come to the place of this first step in the true way. But evermore the verdict of failure has been written on all such endeavor, and oftentimes men have wondered why.

Christ has made it all so plain to the honest seeker after truth. He has put the first thing first in the list of the conditions of Christian growth into the fellowship of His life. But the lesson is so hard for us all. Paul knew the secret as he wrote to the Philippians (2: 5 seq.): "Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross." It was because Christ was completely emptied of self that all the rest was possible. And it is just to the extent that we are thus emptied of self that



He can develop in us, by His own Spirit's working, His own life.

The Greek in the text may literally be rendered, "Blessed are the spiritual beggars." It puts no premium on poverty of purse, or health, or intellect. The poor in purse may be as proud as the rich. The millionaire may reveal a genuine humility of heart. The spiritual riches of God's grace have no necessary relation to the material possessions of men. The text describes a quality of character which involves at least three things: First, a genuine humility of heart; second, a deep sense of a great need in the soul; third, a readiness to ask for the thing needed, in honest and grateful dependence upon God. It is the spirit of the publican as contrasted with that of the Pharisee. The proud heart of the Pharisee is like the stony mountain peak, without capacity to grow anything upon it. The humble heart of the publican is like the lowly valley, fertile and ready to be made fruitful.

How can one become poor in spirit?

In just one way, by having a vision of the riches of character one does not possess, but may. So long as one does not see anything nobler, stronger, richer in life to be possessed, it is impossible to be quickened either with a sense of need or a desire for growth. Here is a boy who stands by the side of a great master musician. He has come to take his first lesson from the master. His comprehension of the realities and possibilities of music are vague, but he possesses the capacity to develop into a musician. The great master interprets one of his noblest themes. The boy listens and wonders. Such marvelous power is surely impossible for him! He cannot play a scale in proper time. He never seemed so small before. He is poor in spirit because he has had a vision revealing his lack of power. Not only so, but down in his heart there is a whisper that he can also be a musician. This sense of his great need of help is accompanied by a longing to become a master. He is a musical beggar. He must wait at the

master's feet with a receptive mind, and open his whole life to all the helpful influences which this contact with his master will bring. Until he shall begin at this place of entrance into the musical life, he cannot make true progress that will realize the desired end.

It is manifestly just so in every human life in spiritual things. A vision of the beauty of holiness as it is revealed in Jesus Christ, a glimpse of the light that shines in the divine character, is essential to the sense of true humility which marks a man who is emptied of self. To be satisfied with one's self is fatal. To be complacent with one's barren spiritual condition is hopeless. The consciousness of a pitiful lack, awakening a deep, deep sense of a great need of God's grace, is the first condition of knowing the reality of a true life in Jesus Christ. Self-sufficiency is suicide. It is the result of a false perspective. God is the giver of all life and power. The poor in spirit have found their right relation to God, and are bowed in the dust before Him,

with Isaiah, crying, "I am unclean!" and also crying with the Psalmist (Ps. 25), "Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. For thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day."

The first Beatitude marks the awakening of the moral consciousness to the sense of sin and the folly of self. It is in the vision of the true holiness of God as seen in the life of Christ that the spiritual beggar realizes at once what he is not and what he may become. The honest recognition of sin, and the honest confession of its deadly grip upon the soul, and the honest acknowledgment of man's helplessness to conquer sin by his own weakness—all this is the mark of the poor in spirit. It is the cry of the Philippian jailor over again: "What must I do to be saved?" As the hungry heart of a starving child cries out when his eyes fall upon the abundance in the show-window of the dealer, so the poor in spirit stand before the riches of God's grace, and the sense of emptiness, of nothingness,

of helplessness, leaves no place for self-assertion. Then, and only then, God can do what He would for the soul.

Herein is the significance of the promise in the text. It is a present tense which greets us here. Many seem to imagine that the gospel of Christ preaches a reward to be realized only in another world. Far from it! Its reward abides forever, but it begins here and now. The poor in spirit open the door for the kingdom of heaven to begin its growth in the life. "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven." It is when the boy begins that he enters into the kingdom of music. All its possibilities wait to be unfolded in his growing life; but it is all his, and his realization of it will come as he faithfully develops its power by the help of his master. The poor in spirit are blessed because the moment one comes to the place of this Beatitude, that moment the kingdom of heaven enters his life.

Let us realize what this means. We have said the Beatitudes are more than

ethics. Jesus told Nicodemus that only when a man is born again from above can he enter the kingdom of heaven. In the light of the full gospel, therefore, this Beatitude marks the beginning of the true Christian life. There is an element of faith in the vision of Christ which is present when any one possesses the kingdom of heaven. The personal relation to Christ, and through Him to God, of which He has so much to say in this Sermon on the Mount, of which we are now studying the first words, has its beginning here. To the poor in spirit the message is spoken: "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

Have you found this entrance into the way of the blessed life? Have you wondered why your life has been so feeble and fruitless in spiritual things? Pride is the root of all that is sinful and selfish. Pride is specified as the spirit which caused the fall of the angels of light from the presence of God. They



were not poor in spirit, and their fall was the prophecy of many, many failures, through the years, of the sons of men who never learn the true place in which to stand before God, and realize that He is all and in all. When we learn true humility of heart, because we have seen our utter littleness in a vision of Jesus Christ, our selfishness seen at the foot of His cross, our shrinking from sacrifice, our indifference to the darkness that enshrouds the lives of thousands for whom He died—when we are bowed down thus, then we have started in the way of the blessed life.





Blessed are They that Mourn



## CHAPTER III

### *Blessed are They that Mourn*

“Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted.”—*Matt. 5:4.*

Every man who passes through the first Beatitude finds himself knocking at the door of the second. To the popular mind, however, it seems a strange statement. The thought of them that mourn produces a picture of pain and sorrow, of misfortune and adversity. Yet Jesus Christ asserts that there is a sorrow which is the condition of the richest blessing. Let us see that no mistake marks the order of our Beatitudes, and that the inevitable outcome of the experience of the first is an entrance into the second.

There are two kinds of sorrow. The first is essentially selfish, and is occasioned by the loss of earthly possessions, of frustrated ambitions, of

wounded pride. It may be the pain of physical disease and even the sorrow of the bereavement of those we love. All this may have no blessing in it at all. Christ by no means intends to teach that all who mourn will be blessed. There may be only the bitterness of rebellious hearts, the joy of life turned to ashes because there is no hope in the heart, and no light touching the darkness of the grave. Such mourning is really a useless lament, because it has to do with what we have, or have not, and is not concerned about what we are, or are not.

Christ had reference to a different kind of mourning. The logic in our thought makes it plain that only the poor in spirit are blessed when they mourn. And the mourning which the Master had primarily in mind is not the sorrow because of bereavement, or the pain of physical suffering. It is the grief of soul in the consciousness of sin, and the sense of self-condemnation before the eye of God. Christ had reference to that pain of heart which

an honest man knows because his life is so full of sin and self, and so barren of unselfish service. It is the genuine sorrow of the soul because he is not a better man, because he has wasted so many precious years, because his investment of time and thought and strength and money has brought so pitiful a return in a character that should bear a likeness to Jesus Christ. Evidently only the poor in spirit can be truly blessed when they mourn.

We have said the first Beatitude is the awakening of the moral consciousness. The second is the sting of the conscience. The self-satisfaction of the Pharisee betrayed no pain of conscience, revealed no spiritual stagnation to his own moral consciousness; but the cry of the publican revealed both. The first Beatitude is the awakening of the sense of opportunity, while the second follows on and goes deeper, to the awakening of the sense of responsibility. A revelation of light brings both joy and pain. It dispels the darkness in the room, but shows

the dirt that must be cleaned away. The first Beatitude is the leap of faith, out of the vision of God in Christ and the need of the soul, while the second is the sorrow of repentance because of sin and failure. It is when a man will say, "I ought," that he will also say, "I have not been true."

But true repentance is not simply the mourning of grief. It is a repentance unto life, which, with apprehension of the mercy of God, turns from sin with the purpose to live a life of new obedience. Therefore it is blessed. The first Beatitude is Jacob at Jabbok seeing himself as the supplanter, and utterly unworthy of the blessing of God; but the second is the travail of his soul in the consciousness that God is touching his life. The first Beatitude is seeing the face of God, while the second is feeling the hand of God. Until the face of God is seen, there is no sense of blessing in the presence of the hand of God; for the rebellious heart will not recognize God as in it at all. But when the vision of God has revealed

the touch of God, then the soul is truly blessed in its agonizing struggle to know the victory over sin and self.

Do you ask why this is true? Why the deepest experiences of spiritual discipline are marked by the keenest spiritual grief? Why the seed, if left alone in the sunshine, never unfolds its life and power and fruit, but when it is buried in the ground, or crushed between the upper and nether millstones, liberates its God-given blessings for men? Why the plow must first cut deep into the soil before it can nurture the seed? You may say it cannot absorb sunshine and moisture unless thus broken and softened; but why must it needs be so? I do not know. No man knows. But I do know it is God's way, and experience has proved it to be the way of the richest blessing. Christ was made perfect through suffering. It was the only way for Him, as it is for us.

To such the precious promise is given—"They shall be comforted." This comfort is not merely consolation.



That is really only negative. It is not enough to clear a field of weeds. It must be planted with new seed, if a harvest be secured. This comfort is something positive and reconstructive. The Latin word "comfort" means "made strong together." It involves a fellowship with another. The Greek word "Paraclete" means "one called to your side." Christ describes Him as the Spirit of truth and calls Him "another Comforter," the Master Himself being our first mighty helper. Herein is the blessing for all who mourn, being poor in spirit; they are strengthened by the fellowship of the Spirit of Christ.

Note the simple fact that if you have sufficient strength, no burden can be too heavy to bear. The promise in the first Beatitude involves coming to Christ, that in the second Beatitude involves abiding in Christ. The first brings cleansing, the second power. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them



which are exercised thereby" (Heb. 12:11). This is the blessedness of the second Beatitude. Have you taken this second step in the way? If so, give the Comforter His full place by your side, so that you may increase in strength, in faith, in love, in peace, in joy. If you have not taken this second step, will you do it? Only as you do, can further progress be made in the way of blessing. "Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted."

We have known them. An earnest Christian once came to her pastor to tell him that in recent weeks she had felt the conscious touch of God's presence in her life, with an increasing sense of reality and blessing. She desired to say little about it, but wished to bear witness to God's grace to a few who would understand. Not many weeks later a great and overwhelming sorrow came upon the home. That dear woman grew old in a week. Some of her friends said this trial came as a test of her faith; but she

said no, she had a different explanation. Her heavenly Father had promised her grace sufficient for each day of her life. He saw this terrible blow coming, but in His loving wisdom did not deem it best to prevent it. So He drew her closer to Himself, that when the sorrow came she would have grace sufficient to bear it. Was there ever anything more beautiful than that? The keener the grief, the deeper was her love toward God! She had been comforted, strengthened together with Him.

The old illustration of the revelation of the night is in point. In the day of sunshine we have no wide perspective, no proper appreciation of our true place in the universe of worlds. But when the night comes down, and the gleaming stars appear, we have a vision of the truth which the day never could have told. The coming of the night is a precious blessing. Exactly so, very many of the deepest lessons which we should know are the lessons from the stars which shine in God's spiritual sky when the night of sorrow drops its

shadows upon the soul. They are the stars of hope. They tell of the Father who is the God of all worlds and who does not forget. He is the keeper of His promises, and He will not forsake His children.

Ah, yes, thousands have found this consolation of heaven. They have gone into the valley of the shadow, but the light shines down upon them from the gate of pearl. They have faced odds in life's struggle, but have found that "God and one make a majority." They have tasted the bitterness of guilt and sin in burning repentance of heart, but have known the quiet peace of the forgiving love of God as the Comforter has revealed the way of cleansing in Jesus Christ. They have fallen victims to the adversary of our souls and proved the weakness of human endeavor which forgets God; but out of the sorrow of defeat they have found a new faith in Him who will ever strengthen us together with Himself, until His keeping power whispers an earnest of victory to the soul.

"Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted." Their number is increasing in the earth and multiplying in the kingdom of heaven. John saw them in apocalyptic vision (Rev. 7:9, 13-14): "After this, I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands. . . . And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said unto me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

Blessed are the Meek



## CHAPTER IV

### *Blessed are the Meek*

Matt. 5: 5.

He who passes through the first and second Beatitudes has found the key which unlocks the door of the third. True beggary of the spirit will lead to genuine penitence of the heart, and will not stop there; but will lead on to the submission of the will. The true psychology of character building is in these Beatitudes. The awakening of the moral consciousness is followed by the quickening of the conscience, and this leads straight on to the action of the will. The appreciation of opportunity honestly faced with a courageous sense of responsibility at once involves the need of self-mastery. The only test of self-mastery is bringing the will into actual obedience to one who is worthy to be obeyed.

In the study of the second Beatitude we noticed that spiritual discipline involves suffering in various forms, and that this is manifestly God's law for us. Just here we touch the third Beatitude. What shall be our attitude toward our heavenly Father in the midst of these experiences? It will be either one of rebellion, or one of submission. Thus we are in the realm of the human will. This word translated "meek" is used in its primary meaning as describing the spirit of tamed horses. There is the spirit of gentleness, but it is in no sense negative. It is not that submission of a collapsed will which one sometimes sees in sorrow, when God is considered to have crushed the soul into a state of incapacity. It is not that. But it is a positive, loving, responsive submission, which has already realized the presence of the Comforter, and which says to the Father, "Thy will be done," even as Christ Himself said it.

Too many have thought of this attitude of the will as being a negative submission. It is much more, a posi-



tive readiness to obey in view of the appreciation that to realize the doing of God's will there is a vast amount to be done. The word "biddable" will probably express the thought of the text. We have the three Beatitudes in Isaiah's experience in the temple. He was wakened as never before, by his vision of God, to his own and his people's sin and need. His heart was broken and his face in the dust, as he cried, "I am unclean!" But he was comforted, as those wondrous words came from the messenger who brought the live coal of God's touch upon him: "Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin cleansed." Then he heard the voice saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" He was face to face with the will of God, and his soul leaped to reply: "Here am I, send me." He did not ask where he was to go; for he was ready to go anywhere that the will of God would send him.

Let us appreciate this double character of the meek. Their blessedness is

found both in the submission of the will and in the energy of the will. We have here patience and purpose uniting in perseverance. This manifestly means to be strong. The self-willed always betray the lack of self-control, which is weakness. Our Beatitude pictures Jesus at that moment of which we read that "Jesus held His peace" (Matt. 26:63). The secret of His power was in the consciousness that He was in perfect accord with the will of God. He had mourned and had been comforted, strengthened with victory out of the struggle of Gethsemane for all that came in the way of the hill of Golgotha and its cross.

In passing we should anticipate the thought of those who recall the act of the Master when He took a whip of small cords and cleansed the temple from the desecrating money-changers and the sellers of doves. It was the same Jesus whom we see here. He was just as calm in His self-control. It was His teaching concerning the will of God which all present realized to be

the secret of His strange power, so that no man said Him nay. It was not a revengeful spirit that found a moment's lodgment in His mind. We find the deepest expression of His spirit of judgment disclosed as He wept over Jerusalem, which would not receive Him, greatly as He longed to come to her people with blessings.

Again we find the spirit of this Beatitude in those words of the Master recorded in Matt. 11:28-29: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest for your souls." He is "meek and lowly in heart." How manifestly true that this third step in the way of the blessed life can only be reached through the first and second! Many have tried to find victory here without meeting the conditions which must go before, and have wondered why they fail. The biddable spirit comes naturally out of a lowly heart,

and quickly bends the neck for the yoke, ready both to bear and to serve. It is the spirit which is not anxious to question or to criticise, but longs to help. Andrew Murray has said that humility is the beauty of holiness. Is it not beautifully true? In the first Beatitude this spirit is in the root, while in the third it is in the fruit and flower. The death of self is again the inner secret of knowing the blessedness of the meek. They who desire to die to self soon learn the joy of doing the will of God.

The twofold spirit of this quality of character is to be revealed in two directions: first, in submission and obedience toward God; and second, in forbearance toward men and in the readiness to help. Evidently the point of significance in the thought is that this quality shines in the life at a time when it is hard to be thus truly meek. The glory of doing the will of God when it is easy, and along the line of our own desires, is the glory of a harmony with our Master in so far; but the Father is

more surely glorified when we breathe the spirit of our Lord in the garden, and find self-mastery through the self-denial which says: "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done."

How aptly this very grace is described by the apostle Paul in the thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians, where he says "love suffereth long, and is kind, envieth not, vaunteth not itself, is not easily provoked, . . . beareth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." But we have made a discovery here. Love has broken into the life. And so it always will when a child of God passes through the gateway of the kingdom and is touched by the Spirit of God, the Comforter. Love alone explains the will, when the energy of the will is apparent, as well as its submission. Nothing destroys the beauty of character like the spirit of resentment. It poisons all the waters of life at the fountain. But love wells out of the heart in the sweetness of forbearing patience, which is the mark of supreme strength. Love

will learn to do the will of God and  
will sing:

Thou sweet, beloved will of God,  
My anchor ground, my fortress hill,  
My spirit's silent, fair abode,  
In Thee I hide me and am still.

O Thou that willest good alone,  
Lead Thou the way—Thou guidest best;  
A little child, I follow on,  
And trusting, lean upon Thy breast.

Upon God's will I lay me down,  
As child upon its mother's breast;  
No silken couch, nor softest bed  
Could ever give me such deep rest.

Thy wonderful, sweet will, my God,  
With triumph now I make it mine;  
And faith will cry a joyous yes!  
To every dear command of Thine.

No pagan moralist ever dreamed of such a philosophy of life as this. To his mind virtue was valor, and there was no robustness of buoyant life in the spirit of meekness. But meekness is anything but weakness, and we have come to honor the truth of the teaching of Proverbs 16: 32: "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that



taketh a city." It is the difference between the striving for mastery on the part of men among their fellow-men, and the desire on the part of men to give the mastery to God. What an illuminating picture have we in that statement of the quarrel of the disciples as to who should be greatest, where we read (John 13: 3-5), "Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; he riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded."

Once more, we must note that this spirit glorified in the text involves a reverence for law. God's law is simply the expression of His will. Moses is counted one of the greatest of men in having this quality conspicuous in his life. We have the secret of it here. It was his reverence for law that is to be found in all his greatness. When

Israel sinned, it was his reverence for law that made it impossible for him to count it an easy thing that God should quickly condone or forgive. Again we see it in that greatest moment in the life of Moses, when he cried: "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin (Ex. 32:31-32). Yet, now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me out, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written." Do we not need this reverence for law in our time? It is at the heart of all social order and civic righteousness.

We must further emphasize the teaching already noted that the biddable child of God has much more than a negative life to live in doing the will of God. We have a place to fill in the earth. Growth comes out of striving to survive, and to increase our powers. This is according to the law of God. Now, meekness is manifest when we see that this purpose to win the place in life which God would have us gain must be governed by reverence for law. It is the spirit of our striving which



determines its character. It is not the spirit which is quick to crush a rival, but it is the spirit of fair dealing, and of earnest purpose to honor every right of every fellowman. I may not amass as much gold by this method; but what I secure will have the blessing of God upon it. Many compromise too easily here. Christ calls for men of unswerving Christian principle to live their religion truly amid the world's intensity of zeal in pushing for place and possessions and power.

The promise attached to this Beatitude is indeed remarkable at first thought. Men are accustomed to think of the meek as not likely to acquire very much. Yet here is the clear statement, and not only so, but it is a promise concerning having. We have noted that the keynote of the teaching is that blessedness is not in having, but in being. True! Yet there is a place for having. But we do not reach that place until we have passed through these three Beatitudes of being. Then we are ready for having, and having

will prove a blessing instead of a curse. For the man who is a stranger to these three conditions of the blessed life, having is not a real blessing. It is very liable to be a curse. Evidently the great principle in the text involves the spirit of contentment, and a little with contentment is great gain.

Moreover, we are prepared to realize the fact that the joy of having is not in having, but in being. It is the quality of character which determines the true joy of having, for this determines whether a man is a slave to gold or a steward of God. Ruskin pointed out that he really possessed all that was beautiful in his neighbor's estate, as truly as did the neighbor, so far as enjoying it was concerned. The neighbor held the deed, paid the taxes, was burdened with the responsibility of its care; but he may not have been able to enjoy its beauty as much as did Ruskin. Possession is something different from ownership.

Again, God gives possession to many of His servants at the hands of others.

Possession is only realized in use. Mr. Moody received sixty thousand dollars a year to carry on his work. Other men made it and gave it to him to use. We are well aware that wealth of itself does not crown a man's life with glory. It is the spirit of true and joyous stewardship which ever crowns the life of one to whom God has given wealth. There is truth in the saying that we do not really possess what we keep, but what we give away to be used for God. This is the mark of stewardship, not only how we get it, and how we keep it, but also how we use it. The spirit which dominates our getting and keeping will really be determined by our purpose in using. It is only in the using that we enjoy what we have. It is our being which determines the use we will make of what we have.

There is another phase of the truth. The true conception of the meek, which involves the energy of the will in the readiness to serve, discloses a gleam of light upon our promise. This is exactly the spirit which will get on in

the world. The secret of all success is the readiness to serve. In every phase of life it is the man who serves best who rises to the place of prosperity and power. And when such men seek to do the will of God, the historian has ever recorded them as being the true kings of the earth. They may be uncrowned kings indeed, but they most truly sway the hearts of men, and the treasures of all the world are at their command.

But notice the fact that the text does not promise full possession here and now. The meek are to "inherit" the earth. All that has been said about having enters into the fullest appreciation of the spirit of the promise. Yet it points to the future. That statement of Jesus in Matthew 19:29 brings us back again to the order of discipline suggested in our Beatitudes: "Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life." Thus we

have two elements in the promise. The steady progress of those who meet the conditions suggested above will one day rule the earth and possess it. Yet their blessedness will ever be in their being, not in their having. But at the end of the age, in the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness, theirs will be that "inheritance which is incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away."



Blessed are They Which do  
Hunger and Thirst after  
Righteousness





## CHAPTER V

### *Blessed are They Which do Hunger and Thirst after Righteousness*

Matt. 5:6.

The first four of the Beatitudes deal with the inner life, and involve a man's personal relation to God. We have noted the progress of the three already considered as having to do with the moral consciousness, the conscience and the will. The fourth has to do with the desires. Too many have attempted to solve the problem of the desires without first settling the questions of the conscience and the will. Not until they are solved, in the spirit of our Lord's teaching, is it possible to deal with the desires successfully and victoriously. But when these are settled according to the will of God, we are ready to enter the realm of the desires in confidence and in peace.

It is at once apparent that here we are in the realm of the prayer-life. Our prayers are our desires at their best, and any desires which do not lead us to God vitiate our prayers. It is the quality of our desires that gives prayer its value, rather than much speaking to God. In fact, our study makes very clear that statement, so often emphasized, that the prayer-life involves a communion with God where we do not so much desire to ask for special blessings as to listen to God speak to us, and have the consciousness of nearness to Him. Hungering and thirsting after righteousness explain this fine quality of spirit in the prayer-life. We are to make constant request of God, with great expectation from Him; but the character of the motive in the heart appears in the character of the prayer itself. Elisha's desire for a double portion of the spirit of Elijah was his deepest prayer, seeking to have God glorified in Israel, and his prayer was answered in mighty power. The two sons of Zebedee who sought places on

either side of Christ in His glory betrayed self-centered ambitions which it was impossible to bless.

There are points of likeness between the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer which are suggestive. The vision of holiness is akin to the intelligent petition that the Father's name might be hallowed, and repentance unto life will involve the coming of His kingdom; but more striking is the parallel between the Beatitude of the meek and the petition "Thy will be done," and between that of hungering and thirsting after righteousness and the prayer for our daily bread; between the Beatitude of the merciful and the prayer for forgiveness; between the Beatitude of the pure in heart and the prayer to be kept from evil. Naturally when Jesus taught His disciples to pray He would specify the very things to be sought in prayer which make up the qualities found in the blessed life. The main-spring of all true desire is indicated in our text, and it may well demand our prayerful study.

When we analyze the experience of hunger, we find it betraying a sense of lack, which is at the same time a sense of need. It is also marked by a sense of pain. This is true of physical and spiritual hunger alike. We have at once recognized our first and second Beatitudes in this experience. Moreover, when righteousness is the bread sought, it is evident that the will has become a partner in the experience. That is to say, we are discovering that as we progress in the experience of the blessed life, all of our Beatitudes, as we go along, move into the next one, and must, before the next can become a reality to the soul.

The word "thirst" carries in it this sense of need; but also suggests an ambition to satisfy the need, an intensity of desire which becomes an absorbing aspiration dominating the longings of the soul. Men will speak of various tests of greatness. Surely one of the most decisive and important is the quality of our desires; and this quality involves both the object sought and the

intensity with which we seek it. Shall we pause to ask ourselves just here what are the real desires of our hearts? What longings master us? What purposes are uppermost? How far is it true of us that we hunger and thirst after righteousness?

Hunger and thirst indicate the demand of life for continued supplies. When these cease, the victory of death is near. It is true in every realm of life. A desire for knowledge is at the spring of all intellectual growth. Supremely important is the fact in spiritual life. The absence of any longing to be in fellowship with God only demonstrates the conquest of sin to which we have surrendered. It is therefore clear that if we have no hunger we cannot have the blessing. To be unconcerned about God, to be indifferent to righteousness as a personal possession, is to be spiritually dead; but to be eager and insistent in the desire for God is to quicken and strengthen the energies of the soul toward certain growth and larger, richer life.

Thus we see that hunger and thirst are impelling forces which push the soul through the gates of effort to actual possession. And these desires are in two directions: heavenward, in the realm of the spirit, or earthward, in the realm of the flesh. We may be living in any one part of the life, and dying in the other, according as our desires dominate. Some trees are dying at the top, as are some men, though still living on lower levels. When you have sought for the most distinctive fact in man, as the crown of all creation, lifted above all other forms of animal life, you will find it to be in the fact that man alone knows the meaning of righteousness, and he alone can be satisfied with righteousness. Therefore it is that Christ pleads with men, saying: "Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed" (John 6: 27).

It is a remarkable fact that the



fiercest struggle for wealth and material possessions is to be found in Christian lands. Henry M. Stanley came back from Africa, having toiled as few men had in his generation, anxious to interest some of the Christian millionaires of England in a most worthy enterprise which would have assisted in the redemption of the people in the dark continent. But after several appeals, all of which were received with indifference, he despaired of help, saying the only thing these men seemed really concerned about was to buy more diamonds for their wives. We boast of our progress, but is not most of it along the line of mechanical invention and material growth? Our great self-binding harvester is a wonderful advance beyond Ruth's sickle; but is our womanhood notably in advance of the character of Ruth?

After all, the supreme question in the realm of the desires is, What is really worth striving for? Is it the possession of the outer or the inner life? The answer must be found in the

appreciation of what this righteousness is to which the text refers. The term is a biblical one. In earlier times it meant that right conduct between men which left them blameless before their standards of judgment. Gradually it came to be recognized as a religious quality, and not simply ethical. Men must take God into the account. The deeper meaning pervaded the social life of the nation, as if it were a great personality. To be righteous is to live in the fear of God and in loyal obedience to His holy will. In order to do this, the sinful must be forgiven and evermore return to God in the spirit of a new obedience. This is possible because God has provided the way of forgiveness in Christ, and of new power through the Holy Spirit. Now to be righteous is to come into the sonship of God through Christ, and grow into the very life of God Himself, as that life fills us more and more.

Again we see the secret of blessing is not in having, but in being. Nay, this Beatitude teaches us that in very truth



being is having. There is no possession of righteousness except as it be inwrought into character. The parable of the pearl of great price illuminates this Beatitude (Matt. 13:45-46). To see that when the life of man possesses the life of God, then God *is* his life, and that nothing else is to be compared with this for value—this is to have the vision which makes clear the real values in human life. As we have seen, it is the lack of appetite which often explains death. Men with gold enough to fill their graves are starving because of spiritual famine, and do not know it.

The parable also illuminates our Beatitude at the point of helping us to appreciate the real problem of self-denial. There are two selves involved, and they have to do with the two tendencies of desires which we have noted. There is the higher self, as well as the lower. Many speak of self-denial as being simply the denial of the lower self; but we must instantly see that when we indulge the lower self, we are

denying the nobler self. The school-boy desires a high grade in his studies, and also desires to play. Which self shall he deny? It is the problem of all life for every human soul. We have some desire for a richer, deeper, sweeter spiritual life, and we have some desire for a worldly life of earthly pleasures. Which self shall we deny? Which do we desire most? This is the question which pierces to the heart of the matter.

Whatever answer the past may be compelled to give to that question in our lives, the text suggests a precious truth for us which is full of hope. It is the fact that thirst may be cultivated, and according as it is cultivated, it develops compelling power. We have seen this truth proved often enough in the baser desires, where men cultivate a thirst which kills both body and soul, a realm of the desires where men are slaves. But it is equally true that this same capacity for cultivating thirst may be developed in the nobler sphere of spiritual growth. Paul wrote himself

"the slave of Jesus Christ," and the power of his spiritual thirst was such as to dominate his whole life in an absorbing passion for souls, a quenchless ardor for God. If you have not yet tasted the blessedness of this Beatitude as you would, you may do so with increasing joy.

The next query, therefore, is evident—What desires are you cultivating? A dominant desire for gold develops the greed of the miser. To cultivate the lower appetites means slavery to the lusts of the flesh. To practice the study of the Bible opens the way of light to the soul. To cherish the grace of prayer unfolds to the inner life that true fellowship with God which is the heart of all reality in living. Nothing else satisfies the soul as this does. The promise of the text has been proved true by many earnest children of the King. But half-hearted playing at the matter is not to be mistaken for genuine cultivation. The only way to destroy finally an old fire is to cease to feed the flame, and the only way to

cherish and develop a new flame is to feed the fire.

"They shall be filled." Satisfaction! It is this all men seek. The trouble with many is that they suppose they will find it where it cannot possibly be found. They are on false trails. Christ is the way, the only way. Christ is the bread of life which came down from heaven. There is a life whose deepest joy is in the perfect fullness with which Christ fills and satisfies the soul. The little fellow from the city who was taken for a summer's outing to the sea-shore stood gazing at the ocean as if nothing could turn him away. When asked what it was that held him thus spellbound, he replied that it was the first time he had ever seen enough of anything. Even thus the infinite treasury of God's grace is ever open to him who hungers and thirsts after righteousness. The righteousness of Christ is sufficient to make atonement for all sin. The righteousness of Christ is available for every development of the life. The righteousness of Christ is the

heavenly garment with which to be clothed upon to enter into the marriage feast of the Lamb. God's gifts fill the treasure house of endless blessings for all who will enter into them.

And the glorious thing about this thirst is that it never ceases. Though it is ever satisfied, it ever increases. He who enters the treasure house, in fellowship with Christ, goes on and on. Each doorway opens into a larger life beyond, and the beckoning hand of the Master is ever inviting us to come up higher, to draw nearer, to find it all dearer and still dearer, as the days go by. The soul exults in the bliss of it all, is bathed in its unspeakable light, and at times glimpses of the glory which is still beyond fill the ravishing vision with an ecstasy of joy. Filled! Satisfied! O soul of man, "taste and see that the Lord is good." Thou shalt grow to be more like Him here, and shalt awake in His likeness, and be satisfied forevermore.



Blessed are the Merciful





## CHAPTER VI

### *Blessed are the Merciful*

Matt. 5:7.

We have been studying the Beatitudes of the inner life. We now turn to the study of those of the outer life. They are the graces involved in the deep principles of true being. These are the same principles flowering out into fruitage of loving and helpful service. The spirit of the first four must flow into the life of the second four. Not until the one has place is the other possible. Men have attempted to make all their moral life simply one of ethics. But ethics cannot be vitalized with power except it be the fruit of a true religion. The ultimate significance and true value of a man's dealings with his fellowman must be found in that man's true relation to God.

Christ teaches us that the first fruits of the blessed life will be manifest in the spirit of mercy toward one's fellow-men. The poor in spirit will say with Longfellow:

"Being all fashioned of the self-same dust,  
Let us be merciful, as well as just."

Strangely enough, some earnest souls have had an idea that one could be just without being especially concerned about one's neighbor. The first commandment is indeed the precept which requires our love to God; but the second is like unto it—"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." To stop with the first is to stop with self, and only proves that a man has never begun his life at the first Beatitude, which leads, in its vision of God, to a right relation also with men. Part of the pain of those who truly mourn comes from the realization of one's failure to care for the welfare of others. The inevitable part of that mourning is a burden for the souls of men.

That wonderful parable in the 18th chapter of Matthew (vv. 23-35) is the

Lord's own commentary upon our text. He points us to the wondrous mercy of God, and teaches us to learn it for ourselves. Imagine the helplessness of the servant, with his great debt, if his Lord had not been merciful! Just so our great sense of need must ever recall the infinite mercy of God. Poor in spirit indeed we would be were there no fountain of grace open for our cleansing, and to satisfy our thirsty souls! Our beggary would only be the harbinger of our despair. But the love of God has met our need, "for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The ransom has been paid. We are bought, not with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.

"In the cross of Christ I glory,  
Towering o'er the wrecks of time;  
All the light of sacred story  
Gathers round its head sublime."

We are all like the servant whose Lord forgave him "that great debt" of

ten thousand talents. Whatever any one may owe us is like the one hundred pence in comparison. As we hope to be forgiven, as we realize anything of the marvelous grace of God in forgiving love manifest toward us, how can we cherish the first element of a revengeful and unforgiving spirit toward a neighbor? Certain it is that such a spirit kills hopelessly the growth of the blessed life, for the Spirit of Jesus Christ is wounded and grieved thereby, and the channels through which the divine love must flow are choked up in our inmost souls. The poor in spirit, like the publican, is so overwhelmed with the sense of his need of the mercy of God toward himself, that he does not cherish a touch of unkindly feeling toward any fellowman, being all too conscious of the weaknesses of his own life.

A very practical expression of this quality will also appear in the cultivation on the part of the Christian of a kindly and charitable judgment of others. This Beatitude will ever give

a man the benefit of the doubt when his action seems to have the appearance of evil. Too many who take the name of Christ have been quick to imagine the worst when appearances are suspicious. Nothing hurts more keenly, or in more serious ways, than this same readiness to condemn. It is well to say nothing when we cannot say the good of a neighbor; but to learn this grace we must first learn to think only good of another until we are compelled to recognize his weaknesses. How earnestly should we take to heart those words of the apostle: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6: 1-2).

But the merciful spirit is more than this. It is positive, active, helpful, quick to accept the opportunity to minister in the spirit of the Master. The parable of the good Samaritan is the living exponent of this Beatitude. It was "he

that showed mercy" who was the true neighbor. And it is Christ who ever speaks to us, each one, saying: "Go thou, and do likewise." The point to it all is found in the purpose of the true child of God to persist in loving the unlovely, the undeserving. It is that power of vision which the Spirit of Christ gives to men to see beneath the repellent exterior, the besotted estate of the fallen, and to see there a man in whom Christ may be unfolded until he shall be transformed into a noble and splendid manhood. We have come to see clearly that the blessed life is not in having, but in being; and therefore we cannot escape the logic of the teaching that we are to be merciful in something more than meeting the physical needs of men. That is beautiful and should be done wisely and in real sympathy; but it is by no means enough. "Man cannot live by bread alone." The inner man must be the object of redeeming love. It is the burden of souls that will constrain to the deep and abiding work of helping



men to find cleansing from sin. Let all the outward needs be met, and the problem will still remain unsolved. Not until the heart is cleansed, and Christ has His place on the throne of the life, will there follow such a transformation as will solve the problem of the whole man. Given Christ, and the rest will follow. Have all the rest, but fail of Christ, and it is all failure to the end.

When James Brainerd Taylor was a young man in the city of New York, he went with a friend to see Dr. Scudder sail as a missionary to India. He has written of that experience: "I shall never forget Dr. Scudder's looks or his words. On seeing him take his last leave of his friends, and of the people on shore, with a true missionary spirit, I felt a tenderness toward the poor heathen to whom he was going that caused my eyes to overflow. I thought that I would be willing to change my situation for his. On returning home I felt a desire to spend that day with the Lord. I retired for prayer, and

found the exercise sweet. My mind was impressed with the necessity for more ministers of the gospel, and many reasons presented themselves why I should devote my life to the good of my fellowmen." Is it not manifest at once that just that is the true picture of the spirit of this Beatitude? It was the spirit of Paul as he cried: "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel!"

Is it not true that the church of Jesus Christ is pitifully indifferent to this duty, this privilege? Is not one of our greatest sins that of unconcern for the souls of men all about us? The gain to the church membership in America on confession of faith in one year is only seven per cent! Think of this! For every one hundred church members in America there are only seven won to Jesus Christ from out of the world in a year! Subtract from this number those who came naturally into the church through the nurture of the Christian home and the Sunday School, and we have reduced the actual gain to the world from seven to three or four.



But what must this mean of complacent lethargy, of selfish indifference, of barren spiritual life on the part of many thousands who have taken the name of Jesus Christ and profess to be witnesses for Him! Well may the church be roused to the appalling significance of these facts, and cry out to God for a visitation from on high, a mighty Pentecostal baptism of the Spirit of God, until men will know what it means to be merciful, to be concerned about the highest welfare of our fellowmen.

The importance of the theme detains us. If we are to be visited with the continued mercies of God, if the riches of His grace are to be given us in greater measure, if the conquering power of divine love is to work through His people to the redemption of the world, then we must be quickened by that same love, we must be constrained by it as was Paul, until our concern for men shall lead to such zeal in their behalf, such effort to share with them the blessings which we enjoy in Christ, that God will pour out increasingly of

His great grace, until we shall not have room to contain it. Who can doubt that this is the purpose of God for us? He would give us His blessings, grace for grace, and according to our faith proved in our fidelity. It not only means that we are forgiven when we forgive in the spirit of God's forgiving love; but it also means the gift of increasing love according as we love our neighbors as ourselves in every part of the world.

It is the law of reflex blessing into which God's direct gift of grace comes. Nothing is more certain to develop a man's life in close nearness to God than the honest concern for some unsaved soul. Nothing drives us to God more surely than this. Nothing keeps us close to the Master like the constraint upon us to live Christ so that our example shall be positive and true as witnesses for Him. Nothing leads into the secret chamber of the soul's prayer-life like this spirit of intercession which such a burden produces, and no richer blessing is found than that which

comes from the spirit of intercession. Thus it is that they who are truly merciful obtain mercy, and grow into such fullness of the life of God as is utterly impossible for one whose Christian life is not an overflowing life of love.

Oh, for a prophet with heart aflame with the spirit of this Beatitude, who will stir the church of God out of its selfish indifference, and quicken its sense of its own need, as well as the world's need! For its own very life the church must begin to grow into larger service for Christ and men. When growth ceases death begins. The latent resources of the people of God are abundant to gird the world with the gospel of light and life, and to lift up the crucified Christ until all men shall be drawn unto Him. The need of the church, as well as that of the world, is to see the Christ who came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many. We must have a new vision of Him that will shame us out of our ease and self-seeking into something of actual sacri-

fice that men may be saved from sin unto God.

This Beatitude suggests a twofold attitude on the part of every Christian. First, is the attitude toward men which will enable them to see Christ in us. Second, that attitude toward men which is prompted by the fact that we are remembering to see Christ in them. He who said, "I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink," He is there in every thirsty soul, waiting to be developed and realized in that life. The Christ who has redeemed us and who has come into our lives, He is waiting there in every other life, pleading with us to be His true witnesses, and help Him to enter the life to which He is still a stranger. Shall we learn this attitude as His people? Dare we be satisfied with anything less? Surely not, if we hope to do the things that please Him.

Edwin Markham, in his poem "Inasmuch," describes the wild tempest which swirled round Moscow's castled height, and how the watchman was

startled by the cry of an old man who hurried by, thinly clad, and almost dead from the chilling blast. The watchman thought of his own father, and

“Tearing off his hairy coat, he ran  
And wrapped it warmly round the beggar man.”

But the act cost the watchman his own life, for the frightful tempest was too severe to be withstood, and he would not leave his post of duty. But as he climbed toward the gate of heaven, the Christ came out to meet him,

“Wearing the coat he gave by Moscow’s dome,  
Wearing his coat, the very coat he gave!  
And Ivan, by the old earth-memory stirred,  
Cried softly, with a wonder in his word:  
‘And where, dear Lord, found you this coat of mine?  
A thing unfit for glory such as thine.’  
Then the Lord answered, with a look of light:  
‘This coat, my son, you gave to me last night.’”

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”





Blessed are the Pure in Heart





## CHAPTER VII

### *Blessed are the Pure in Heart*

Matt. 5:8.

The logic of the Beatitudes is full of surprises for the popular mind, as we have noted at almost every step of the way. Our surprise here is not in the character of the Beatitude, but in its place. For we had noted that the first four are the Beatitudes of the inner life, and the second four involve the outer life. But this Beatitude strikes us as belonging to the first group, rather than the second. Yet a closer study of the subject convinces us that there is no mistake in the place of this mark of the Christian character in the progress of the blessed life.

There is a great law underlying the presence and power of purity. It is the law of contact, and involves relationships, motives, influences. According

to this law. when the pure touches the impure, the relative strength of each will determine whether the pure will be purer or less pure, and whether the impure will be still more impure, or somewhat purified. Again, the condition of activity or passivity in the contact is vitally important. Pour a few drops of ink into a glass of water, and the whole is stained, and remains so. But pour a barrel of ink into a fountain of water, and it will soon toss it all out of its presence and quickly assert its purity with victorious power.

So it is with the problem of purity in the heart of man. It is involved at once in his relation to God on the one hand through Jesus Christ, and on the other hand in his relations with his fellowmen. Under this law the secret of every man's life soon appears. He cannot long conceal it. The character of the contact which dominates his soul is seen and read by all men. The second four Beatitudes involve actual life, and none more vitally than this. It is the actual life before both God

and men; first of all, what a man is before God, and then also, inevitably, what he is before men. As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. Sometimes we deceive our fellowmen for a time, and are not what we appear to be. But it does not last long, and what God knows of us all the time will sooner or later be known to men as well. The heart that lacks the inner virilities and integrities cannot long mask itself even from the eyes of men.

The earlier popular thought of the people to whom Christ spoke about purity was that of a ceremonial purity. The terms "clean and unclean" applied to the outward rather than to the inner life, in the thought of many. As we know, it was the conception of many at the time of Christ. Yet long years before Christ the teaching of Scripture had pointed to the heart-life as the index of purity, and the life which was pleasing to God. When Christ pressed home the need of a pure heart in order to the blessed life, many must have flinched who heard Him, as many of us

must to-day. The Scriptures are filled with familiar passages whose searchings penetrate to the inmost soul of every honest man.

The larger significance of this word "pure" points to a genuine sincerity. It is the Beatitude of reality. When a man lives in this realm, his word will ring true, his life will reveal that quality of character to which men ever respond, ready to trust, ready to honor. It is thoroughgoing, faithful to the end. They tell us men capture the little ermine by watching when it leaves its tiny home, and banking up fresh mud about the entrance so that it cannot return without staining and besmirching itself. But rather than touch one of its white hairs with the defiling stuff, it will lie down and die, and thus is captured. Given a love of purity like that, and the beauty of holiness would quickly fill the earth.

I believe that down in every human heart there is a deep longing to be pure, to be free from the stain of sin, to be the conqueror of temptation. But

to realize the earnest of a victory over sin, such as brings the joyous confidence of an entrance into this life, we must have that vital contact with Jesus Christ which both cleanses and keeps. It is a contact needed not only at the beginning of the Christian life, but needed every day, and all the way. The law of contact obtains here. Jesus Christ is stronger than the power of sin in every life that keeps in vital touch with Him. In this relationship also the active or the passive spirit will have much to do with the result of the contact. Nowhere else is there hope. Every other power is ineffectual. Christ alone saves. Man has the power of choice which will give Christ His place. Give Him His place in a sincere heart, and the soul not only knows the joy of cleansing, but also the joy of touching other lives with vitalizing power, power which comes from the fact, not that we live, but that Christ lives in us. Here is the significance of the place of our Beatitude. When true concern for souls fills our

hearts, the pure life is the very means which God uses by which His witnesses help those who do not know their Lord.

Dr. J. R. Miller has truly said this Beatitude "is not for the sinless, but for sinners forgiven. The pure are those who have been purified. We remember that there is a word in an old book which runs thus: 'Wash you, make you clean. . . . Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.' There is a New Testament word also which answers as antiphonal to this: 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness; and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.' It is very clear, therefore, that this Beatitude, lofty and heavenly as it is, is not impossible of attainment, and does not exclude any sinner of the human family. The pure in heart are sinners who have been forgiven and cleansed." This is akin to the thought suggested in the previous study. We



obtain mercy continually, as we go on in the way of mercy. It is a striking fact that we are not to wait to begin to serve and help until we are perfect. It is our manifest duty and privilege to begin with our imperfect efforts to do the will of God. He has ever used imperfect instruments in His work, and has developed many weak followers into strength just because they were willing to begin to trust and to obey, willing to strive to possess His spirit of love and life.

Another striking teaching is in the text which flows out of what has just been said. Purity is the condition of vision. But growth into an increasingly clearer vision comes with the progress of the soul in the fellowship of Christ along the way of the blessed life. Every condition in God's word is equivalent to the promise that if the condition be met, the blessing will follow. The lens must be clean in the telescope, or we can see no stars, and in the microscope, or we can see no molecules. Sin will blur the lens, and

will cloud the vision. The difficulty is not, as some would claim, in the inadequate character of the truth. It is in the unholy character of the desires, and in the pride of the will in the human soul. The obedient heart ever sees quickly and easily. Therefore some never see God in anything, while others see God in everything. If you have not seen God, something is wrong in your heart. Be sure of that. Thousands who said they could not see God, and who persisted in their statement for years, now testify that they were not honest with themselves, and not true to the facts and forces in the spiritual life. They did not clear away the blur from the vision of the soul caused by sin and self.

When we ask specifically what is wrong with the heart that does not see God, we may be certain that the individual involved has not entered the way of the blessed life through these Beatitudes. Let any one enter and progress by these doors, and we may challenge the world to produce the



man whose heart will not be sincere when he reaches the place of the Beatitude we now study. Without this sincerity the vision is impossible. Consider the difference expressed by different types of people at this point. George Eliot was a brilliant intellect, but her vision of God was not clear and joyous. She declared that she could not believe in a God of love who would permit such actual pain and suffering as the world knows. But a truly sincere heart would make this assertion in genuine sorrow for the sinful and suffering, and would try to do something to help their need.

George MacDonald was as brilliant an intellect as George Eliot; but the sincerity of his heart was such that when he saw the sin and suffering of men, he was filled with the spirit of mercy. He had seen the love of God until he said he was certain of that, whatever else he might doubt. George Eliot doubted, but did nothing to help. George MacDonald took the story of God's love to men, and told them of

redemption from sin, and of comfort and healing for the sick and afflicted. Jesus Christ knew suffering and the reality of the world's sorrow as did no other; but He also saw the love of God as did no other, and revealed to the world the power of redeeming grace. The life that is simply honest with God immediately has a clarified vision of spiritual realities which it is impossible to see while the soul is willing to compromise with self or sin.

The breadth of a man's vision is the measure of his real life. Those who declare they cannot believe in God's love because of human ills confess that theirs is a narrow vision. They are the very people who are anxious to be considered broad-minded. But confessedly they stand at a point of such narrow vision as to be unable to speak one word of hope, for they have no light to bring to the solution of the world's problems. But when a man of unquestioned integrity of character, a man whom all who know him believe to be a man of pure heart, declares that he is

standing at a point where his view includes every fact in the experience of human life, avoiding nothing, and that he finds light and hope and joy and peace, surely he is truly the broad-minded man! He has a message of helpfulness to his fellowmen. This is the world's great need, to have men who are so broad-minded as to see the love of God irradiating through all the conditions and needs of men.

Let us recall our first chapter, in which we emphasized the fact that Christ is the way. It is Christ in whom we have the vision of God. Only in terms of character can moral quality be revealed, and when the Master said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9), He simply stated the truth which is made luminous in our text. It is only the pure in heart who can see God in Jesus Christ. For the secret of faith in Jesus Christ is the desire to possess a character like His. No mere desire to satisfy a man's curiosity about the superhuman will give him a true vision of God. That is an

illuminating statement about Christ which tells us: "In him was life, and the life was the light of men." There is a teaching of truth which satisfies the intellect as to the reasonableness and reality of the Christian faith. But it never is realized until the student desires that the product out of his process of study shall be a character like that of Jesus Christ.

Were we to see a child looking through a telescope, with the announcement that he is trying to see God, we would smile. Not because God has not revealed Himself as Creator in the universe of worlds, but because we know that spiritual reality is something not to be discerned by the telescope. But when men who are called great scientists try to do just what the child attempted to do in vain, let us remember that not a few have made the vital mistake of supposing that there is only one way to the vision of God, namely, the way of intellectual demonstration. No, there is something more than this. We see the beauty of the landscape

with the physical eye; but we see the beauty of holiness no less surely with that vision of spiritual consciousness which tells of the reality of the unseen.

Evidently all vision is not alike. There are different sizes of telescopes, and there are all kinds and degrees of spiritual vision. It is determined evermore by the character of the heart-life. There is progress here, slow or rapid, little or much, as the man cultivates his vision and burnishes the lens until it is more and more cleansed from the blur of sin. We have noted the greatness of the meekness of Moses. Let us remember how the burden of his prayer was revealed in a great longing for mercy for Israel. His heart was filled with true mercy for his fellowmen. Then let us recall how immediately afterwards (Exodus 33) the very climax of his sense of nearness to God is revealed in that prayer which shows the inmost throbbing of his soul: "I beseech thee, show me thy glory!" Deeper and still deeper grew the longing in the heart of Moses to know God more

fully. And each added touch of God upon his life only intensified that longing. It is ever so. It was his hungering after righteousness continuing and ever hungering for more.

Notice at this point the great fact that all of our promises in these Beatitudes involve a continuous progress in our relation to God. It is the vision of God in Christ at the very beginning which explains the coming of the kingdom into every heart. It is the comfort of God which is given to all who mourn in the grief which seeks to be strengthened together with Him. It is the will of God which the meek seek to realize, and the whole earth is His who prepares an abiding place for His own. It is God who fills all who hunger and thirst after righteousness, and it is God who reveals the riches of His love to those who have caught something of His spirit, and are loving their neighbors in very truth because His love constrains. All this is just a steady growth into the vision of God. Each additional Beatitude opens heaven



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wider and still wider to the child of the King, and in the next promise the peacemakers rise to receive the name of His children, and move on into the fullness of the kingdom in the presence of His throne.





Blessed are the Peacemakers



## CHAPTER VIII

### *Blessed are the Peacemakers*

Matt. 5:9.

That was a moment of supreme significance, when the shadow of the cross was upon the Master, when the great eclipse was beginning to move across the sky of the disciples, when they were to be as sheep scattered, not having a shepherd, and He spake those wondrous words: "My peace I give unto you." Everywhere else there was agitation, but in the heart of Jesus there was peace; and not only peace for Himself, but also for His disciples. All through the tragic hours that followed, in the midst of mockings and cruel scourgings, we read that "Jesus held His peace." It was the secret of His victory. He was at peace with God, and He could be at peace with men.

To this life of peace Christ summons

His disciples. They had not thought of it as the life of noblest character. Again the people wondered at His words. The peacemakers the sons of God! The world had been wont to call the great conquerors of the nations by that title. They deified the Cæsars. The pagan idea of the gods led the people to count their most splendid qualities to be those of wondrous prowess in the realm of physical power, rather than spiritual excellence or moral quality. Even the Jews pictured Jehovah as a mighty man of war, and dreamed of the day of the coming Messiah as one when a mighty son of David would break the yoke of Rome.

All of which reminds us how men failed to understand God, and how they marveled when Christ taught them to realize the Fatherhood of God, loving the world so as to give His only Son for our redemption. The final conquering power in the world is love, not force. Love conquers by self-sacrifice, not by self-assertion. That Roman centurion, who had been reared

in the pagan conception to which we have referred, had a wondrous vision on the hill of Golgotha, as he watched the crucified Christ, and the truth broke in upon him that this was the Son of God. He saw it for the first time, and the conquering power of forgiving love that speaks from a cross became to him thereafter the expression of the life of God.

Napoleon was right when he said: "You speak of Cæsar, of Alexander, of their conquest, and of the enthusiasm which they enkindled in their soldiers. These with Charlemagne and myself founded great empires; but upon what did the creations of our genius depend? Upon force. Jesus alone founded His upon love; and to this day millions would die for Him." It was God's lesson to Israel; but they had forgotten. David could not build the temple because he was a man of war, a man of blood. The temple was to be the symbol of life and peace.

And men still forget. The nations that have taken the name of Jesus

Christ, the Prince of Peace, still engage in war, and seek to justify the contest by the sword as the forerunner of a Christian civilization, and the providential hand of God in the affairs of men. But not thus does the Word of God teach. The God of nations is the God of battles, as well as the God of peace; but that means that He will overrule in the affairs of men, and make the wrath of men to praise Him. But it never means that war is God's way to advance the interests of the kingdom of heaven upon earth, as a direct agency. Adoniram Judson with an open Bible at the edge of Burmah represents the true messenger of Jehovah, as no army of a Christian nation could ever do, as it commanded the opening of closed ports to the commerce of the world. The principle is wrong. The method is false to Jesus Christ, who said: "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight." The idea of the Crusades is exactly consistent with the thought

that the sword may be used in opening the way for the truth; but what Christian of to-day would accept such a position in its bald significance? To-day, as ever, Christ declares the peacemakers to be blessed, and that they shall be called the children of God.

The perpetual injunction of the New Testament to men is in the words: "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts" (Col. 3:16). "Follow after the things which make for peace" (Rom. 14:9). "God hath called us to peace" (1 Cor. 3:15). But it is evident that the only way we can have the peace of God is to be at peace with God. The most pathetic of all battles is that fighting against God which marks so many human lives. Every man who gives his life to sin in any form only does so by resisting the promptings of the Spirit of God. Back of the spirit of strife between men is the spirit of rebellion against God. This is at the root of the truth of that famous utterance of a great soldier that "war is hell." Stop



rebellion against God in the hearts of men, and antagonism among men will soon cease.

Our great work, therefore, as the followers of the Prince of Peace, and as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, is to fight the spirit of rebellion against God, wherever we find it and in whatever form. The third Beatitude in the second group has an immediate relation to the third in the first group. It is when the meek say, "Thy will be done" to God, that the way of peace shall be bright and beautiful. We are not simply to be *peacekeepers*, not simply to hold ourselves from the spirit of war and strife; but we are to be *peacemakers*, positive factors in the effort to help men to be at peace with God and their fellowmen. When we put the spirit of the merciful with that of a pure heart, we are within a step of the pathway of peace.

Let us realize that the intensity of this spirit is one of the world's greatest needs. When one has come to feel the burden of souls, and has caught a vision



of God's great love for men, then the very essence of his life becomes a burning passion for human souls, a tireless longing to see men reconciled unto God and dwelling together in the bonds of peace. Manifestly the solution of life's problem is just at this point. Until men have found peace, all else is in vain. Right relations with God and men are the highest good. We must strike at that point where sin brings discord and strife. It is manifestly clear to all that the only way for us to know this victory is to receive from the Lord that peace which He offers to give, and then help others to possess its precious blessings.

It cannot be gainsaid that the trophies of peace are far more precious than the trophies of war. In the realm of industry the nations have learned to their sorrow that standing armies are a crushing burden, and the people carry the scars of battle more upon the hearts of the bereaved than upon the bodies of warriors. Two-thirds of the human history that has

been written has told the story of wars, and yet the world's progress has been distinctive in its times of peace. Only then have the great builders of empires made their peoples strong, by the achievements of industry rather than the conquests of battle. May the day hasten when war shall be impossible where the name of Christ is loved! It is a sacred duty, binding every true follower of Christ, to pray and strive for that auspicious time when swords shall be beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks.

There is encouragement for us. For although human history has much of its story devoted to war, yet it is steadily recording the progress of peace. War is on the decline. The convictions of men are steadily growing into the demand that war shall cease. Once it was the main occupation of the world's choicest men, but now it is given over to the professional soldier, who is no longer first in the classes of the best citizens. The Prince of Peace is coming to His throne.

Above the tramp of armies we hear the song of the angels promising the victories of love. It is already our ideal of the future. Once it was not. Having established the ideal, our Lord will lead us on to its realization.

We need to revise our estimates of power. The manifest truth is still largely unheeded that the power which brings the truest blessings to men is the power of God in the realm of spiritual influence. The men of God who have wrought righteousness by His grace are the world's truest and mightiest heroes. Paul was a mightier soldier than Cæsar. He was a great captain on the firing line of the age-long battle between righteousness and sin. Luther was a mightier soldier than Napoleon, but he fought with weapons which would have been impossible to the brilliant Corsican. The ambitions of men must rise to the point of being centered upon such heroism as will prove dauntless against the adversary of the souls of men. The victory on the battlefield of the

human heart is the final response to the angel song of peace on earth.

The promise which awaits this victory is that of entrance into the glorious liberty of the children of God. The one great revelation which our Saviour brought to men is that of sonship in the living God. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (I John 3: 1). The reality of redemption is in this. The indwelling of the Spirit of Christ, who enables us to say, "Abba, Father!" is the mark of the true follower of the living Saviour. In this we have the foretaste of the eternal joy and peace of the redeemed. The unfolding of the growing Christian life here is simply the realization of this sonship, and the fellowship we have in Christ as we learn better what He meant when He taught us to say: "Our Father who art in heaven." To have God's life more and more fill our lives, this is the blessedness of sonship, the priceless joy of the children of God.

Again we note that our promise has the beginning of its fulfillment here. Such peacemakers are called the children of God even now among men. "Herein is the Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples" (John 15:8). The more we secure the title of His children, the more we glorify the Father. Men see that we are nothing in ourselves, and that God is coming to be all in all. The very essence of our Beatitude is in the surrender of self. This is at the heart of all peacemaking, and it is also at the heart of every life that is seeking to glorify God. This is ever the secret of all real power, for it is giving God His way with our lives, so that He can use us according to His will. This is ever the joy of all deep blessing, that God is coming to be more and more our very life. When men come to this place of nearness to God, until God is the pith of every thought, God the wing of every word, God the spring of every action, God the pole of the heart, God the goal of the life, then we

shall know what that marvelous promise to Abraham long ago meant to that mighty hero of the faith: "I am thine exceeding great reward." And as we are born again into the kingdom of heaven, and live on into the joy of the Father's presence forever, this shall be the crown of our immortal days, that we are called the children of God.

Blessed are They Which are  
Persecuted for Right-  
eousness' Sake





## CHAPTER IX

### *Blessed are They Which are Persecuted for Righteousness' Sake*

Matt. 5 : 10.

Of all the masterpieces of art which present the various incidents of that tragic week in Jerusalem when they crucified the Lord of glory, the one which best presents the inner spiritual significance of the experiences of Jesus is that by Doré which pictures the Christ coming from the Prætorium. Near the Hall of Judgment stand Pilate and Herod, who were made friends that day. Jesus, majestic in His bearing, clad in a robe of white, is beginning to descend the stairway. All about is the surging multitude, held back by the Roman soldiers, while at the left-hand lower corner Judas crouches, with his hand upon the bag. At the foot of the stairway is a slave in

charge of the waiting cross. Amid the crowd one is immediately impressed with the loneliness of Jesus. All the spiritual significance of the cross is here, without the repellent suggestions of the physical sufferings of the cross itself. Over it all, our text should be written.

Christ Himself is always the exemplar of all His teachings, as we have noted, and in Him each Beatitude is complete in its incarnation. In one sense the seven Beatitudes which precede complete the Christlike life; but even as the seven colors of the prism blend into one of pure whiteness, so in this Beatitude we see the fullness of the white light of a character loyal to Jesus Christ.

The thought in the text is twofold: first, the faithful witness must be aggressive, must oppose the false and build the true. He cannot be passive in the face of the world's need. Therefore he will meet just what the Master met, the pain of opposition, a cross. He must go through this experience

because of fidelity to Jesus Christ. This is the climax of the Christian experience. It is being obedient even unto death. We see it in the experience of Judson in the terrible days spent in the prison at Ava, where for twenty-one months he endured untold hardships without a murmur, preaching Christ to his fellow prisoners, and composing hymns of praise to God which reveal a truly remarkable spiritual victory.

The second consideration in the text involves the development of character. We have already noted in a former Beatitude the place of suffering in spiritual discipline. Here we have the fullness of that experience. The resistant force is always the occasion for the development of strength; and in this phase of it we behold the deepest qualities of the soul challenged and developed. That was a great day for Paul when he cried: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" But a far greater day in Paul's spiritual growth was that later one in which he could

say: "I am ready to be bound, not only, but also to die for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13). He had learned to say with an honest heart: "I rejoice in tribulations."

They tell us that in the center of the cyclone there is a nucleus of calm. So the soul is at peace which has come to this climax of devotion to Christ. The martyrs saluted Cæsar with a smile as they faced the wild beasts of the arena. Such is the victory of the soul that is made chaste through chastening (Heb. 12:6), and "made meet to be partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12). At first thought we may not realize how constantly there have been those victorious saints who have given their lives for their faith. Yet every century has seen them. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we read of such in the earlier days. Through the ten persecutions of the first Christian decades they march, and in every century of the Christian era we find them. The Reformation witnessed their heroism, in the mountains of the Alps,

where Vaudois counted not their lives too dear for the sake of the Saviour; in the Highlands of Scotland, where Covenanters sealed their faith in blood; while in our own time Armenians and Chinese bear witness to the same apostolic zeal and loyalty which the early centuries beheld.

It is the old saying ever made true that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." How significant is that expression in the epistle to the wavering Hebrews, "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin" (12:3). Some had, and some have unto this day. They, above all others, have wrought into the fiber of the Christian church that peculiar power of Jesus Christ which shares the fellowship of His sufferings, and knows the fellowship of His glory. Is not this at the very foundation of our American history? They came to these shores from those lands of bigotry and blood, praying Covenanters, praying Puritans, praying Hollanders, praying Huguenots, seeking civil and religious liberty,



and ready to die to secure and maintain it. What then? Who of us can doubt that it is only as we cherish the blessings they secured to us in the same spirit of devotion, that we shall continue to grow strong as a people?

This word "persecution" means to follow closely, and suggests the dogging steps of a malignant detective, which will not cease so long as we remain in the conditions of the earthly life. Not at first is its presence made dreadful, but alluring, like an angel of light. If, later, we find the suffering which comes from the yielding to sin, let us not confuse the fact, and imagine the persecution is something to endure as if it were heroic. Nay, if after turning from sin, we realize that the experiences which come to us are carried over from the former life, let us not forget the old law of seed-sowing and harvest. Long after Jacob turned to God, in his crisis struggle at Jabbok, he reaped some of the harvest of his former life of deception and sin.

But it is when Satan is baffled that



he throws off the mask, and reveals the hate which crucified our Lord, and would fain drag us down to death. This is not only, nor always, in the realm of the physical. Often is it in temptations that would kill the soul. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood," writes Paul (Eph. 6:12), "but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." No Christian ever comes to the point of growth but he finds the adversary of his soul ready to antagonize his spiritual advance; and the more earnestly he strives, and the more surely he gives promise of victory, the more intense and virulent is the foe.

It is the branch that beareth fruit that is pruned. It is the gold that has gone through the flame which is purified from alloy. It has ever proved a powerful way to help a good cause to suffer for it. Something of the secret of the victory of the cross is in this experience. The Master's hand leads

ever in this way. It is the way He went. The Hebrew children in the fiery furnace were in the company of one who was like unto the Son of God. It is truly said that "love can never know the deepest experience of life until it has suffered for the object of its love." It is this experience which brings the revelation of light. God knew what Abraham could do in his faith and love before the day of the altar; but Abraham himself never knew until that day of testing and of victory. The Æolian harp only sings when the storm swirls through its vibrant strings and makes its strange, rich melody.

Our text does not suggest that the Christian will escape the deepest sorrows of the soul in being true to the Lord of life. "The lash cuts no less deeply, and causes no less poignant suffering, because it is a Christian who is bending under its cruel strokes." The Master staggered and fell under His cross because His human body was weakened by bleeding from scourging, and by sleepless fatigue. But His buoy-

ant soul, in full mastery of the situation, said: "Weep not for me, but for yourselves and for your children." The cross has given us the term "excruciating," as applied to pain and suffering; but from His cross He refused the stupefying potion, for He would not shirk the bitter dregs of the cup, nor the red blood of His baptism. To His own He speaks: "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

It is in the light of all this truth that we can understand the cry of the prophet: "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion!" Are you having no struggle? Do you not feel the power of the devil fighting against you, as you are striving for the salvation of some soul, or for the victory in your own life? If not, be deeply concerned. Mr. Moody was wont to say that if many days went by without revealing some word of protest against his preaching or work, he feared the devil was too well satisfied with his life.

This suggests that the cause is the

vital thing. There is no virtue in simply suffering, if it be not for a cause that is worthy. It is the man who is persecuted for righteousness' sake who is blessed. The motive is everything. It is the love that endureth all things. The blessedness lies in what the man is, not in the fact that he suffers. The quality of the gold is the important thing, not the fact that it has passed through the fire. It is because the saint is a shining mark that Satan sends his dart against an earnest life. This is the character out of which the kingdom is being builded with hope.

In the first Beatitude the door into the kingdom is opened. The succeeding steps lead through the treasure rooms of the palace of the King. In this last one we have reached the throne room. Here is the octave of a life that is hid with Christ in God. We see Stephen, the first of the Christian host to enter into this blessed experience, in the vision which ravished his soul, beholding the King in His beauty; and we hear Paul in a rhapsody of

ecstasy because of the unspeakable glory that marked the same sort of vision, exclaiming: "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body" (II Cor. 4: 8-10 and 4: 14—5: 1). "Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might, through the thanksgiving of many, redound to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal;

but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

# The Joy of the Blessed Life





## CHAPTER X

### *The Joy of the Blessed Life*

Matt. 5:12.

When standing in the vale of Chamonix at nightfall, the traveler finds the shadows covering the valleys at an early hour. But the people throng the streets and keep looking upward toward the snow-crowned summit of Mont Blanc, which is bathed in a glory of shimmering light that seems to flash down from the very throne above. It is the glory of the after-glow. This text is the after-glow of the Beatitudes. In our study we have noted that the word translated "blessed" is a plural of excellence, denoting the multiplied riches of the blessed life. There is a note of joy in the word itself sounding all the way from the beginning, and here it breaks out into a climax of song. In a very helpful and

suggestive discussion of the subject, the Rev. Clarence Lathbury describes the entire series of Beatitudes as "The Code of Joy."

Again the text presents a paradox in the thought of the popular mind. How contrary to the human point of view is the teaching that men are to rejoice because of the experiences which thus lead them by the way of the cross! After the completion of the octave of the development of character the Master adds these words; and we have learned to appreciate the fact that Christ knows. As we have walked with Him through the way of the blessed life, we have found that He fully knows its secret. Hence we are not to doubt as to the fact that this life must lead to joy; though we may wonder how it can be.

Christ was speaking out of His own experience, as He ever did. We have the experience of His whole life to illuminate His words. We hear Him saying under the shadow of His cross: "Now is my soul sorrowful, even unto

death." Yet within an hour He is saying: "These things have I said unto you that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." We are told of Him that it was "for the joy that was set before him" that He "endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2). What was His joy? Manifestly many elements entered into it, and continue so to do; but surely a cardinal element therein is that of the joy of victory.

It is here that we have light in the reference to the prophets who suffered in earlier days. Like Himself, they were the spokesmen of God. They were the true witnesses of the realities of the spiritual life. It is a striking fact that every prophet uttered a message marked by two features: first, one of condemnation because of sin, and second, one of hope to the penitent people who would return unto God and live. The first was always intended to lead men to the second. But many do not want the truth if it hurts, even if the cross will lead to a

crown. They prefer to escape the cross which is at hand, and risk the loss of the crown which is far off. They fail to see that the only way to have the victory is to begin the battle. To continue to hesitate means to be lost.

We need not go hunting for crosses. But we must not evade them, if they come. Christ did not come to the earth for the sake of dying. His aim was the redemption of mankind, and because the cross was in the way of the accomplishing of that redemption, He did not shirk it, but set His face steadfastly toward it as He journeyed in the way of duty. The secret of His strength was in the knowledge that in lowliness of heart He was saying to the Father: "Thy will be done." His conscience was clear and His purpose unflinching, and He saw His joy through it all.

That word "falsely" gives another clue. It is the misery of the guilty conscience which cuts the nerve of victorious power. The man who knows he

can look into the eye of God, though conscious of his unworthiness and sin, and know that God sees his sincerity of heart and honesty of purpose, can face the world with a quiet mind and be not afraid. Moreover, the words "for my sake" suggest an added inspiration to the faithful. We are His witnesses. He Himself knew temptation. His transfiguration was a day of exultant joy, yet in it He had a vision of His cross and "the decease He was to accomplish at Jerusalem." But the power of His joy carried Him to His cross in a steadfast fidelity to God and men.

Let us consider the thought in another way. We remember the request of the two sons of Zebedee that they might be one on the right hand and one on the left hand of the Master in His glory. Jesus told them they knew not what they asked. He did not deny the request, but gave them to see that if they secured their desire, it could only be by meeting the conditions thereto. It is as if two young men



were to go to the President and ask to be made his Secretary of State and Secretary of War. He would be compelled to say to them that he could not give secretaryships thus out of hand. If they should meet the conditions, the day would inevitably come when these positions would wait for them.

Is it not likely that as Jesus listened to those two sons of Zebedee, He looked ahead just a little way and saw that scene at Gethsemane? The soldiers were coming with swords and staves to take Him. Then was the time for these two young men to be one on His right hand and one on His left; but at that testing time they forsook Him and fled. Or He looked on a little further to Calvary, and saw three crosses there. Who can doubt that if James and John had been all to Christ during those crisis hours that they might have been, they would have paid the price of their steadfast loyalty by being the other two crucified ones on those two crosses on His right hand and on His left? But to be crucified



with Christ on Golgotha, what everlasting glory that would have been for James and John! Now we see it. Imagine the joy of knowing that I can face my cross and look into the eye of God, saying: "My Father, it is all right. I am trusting with thankful joy!" This is the blessedness taught in our text, which explains the joy of Christ, and tells of a joy that His faithful followers may also know.

We see it in Paul, out of hardships manifold, stoned, shipwrecked, beaten with stripes, burdened with the care of the churches, saying: "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy" (Acts 20:24). Soldiers glory in their scars. It is that joy which leads Paul to say: "I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus." Thus also Peter and John departed from the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer persecution for the sake of the Christ who had died for them. Here is the secret of the victorious life. It is the soldier's

secret. Imagine the soldier enlisted, equipped, facing the foe, yet evading the battle! Impossible! His joy in facing the foe for a terrific fight is in his confidence of victory, and because through victory he sees the coming glory of the cause to which he is devoting his life.

Some people seem to think the way to be happy is to evade sorrow and ignore sin. It cannot be! Such do not have less of sorrow and sin, but more. It is the heroism of the reality of life which sees the foe, but will not flee, and which allies the life with the only One who can give the victory. It is by His help that we may climb to the place of power, and know the joy which He knew under the shadow of His cross. One of the most important facts for the Christian to learn is that fear and faith are mutually exclusive. As fear comes in, faith goes out; but as faith comes in, fear goes out. The heroes of the faith have been the men of victory ever, and for the reason that they have not flinched because the way

of the good fight of faith was a way of hardship, of suffering, of persecution. Faith in the Lord of love and power enabled them ever to hear Him saying: "Be not afraid: only believe."

How the world needs such people! Those who know the song of joy even in the hour of sorrow. Those in whom the light shines even when the way is dark. Those who do not shrink when the cross is in the way and heavy to bear, because their eye is upon the crucified One, whom they see beyond His broken tomb, saying: "Because I live, ye shall live also." They are the salt of the earth. They are the light of the world. For this life they have found the way of deepest joy. But in the text the Master draws the veil: "Great is your reward in heaven." The life in the heavenlies begins here, but goes on forever. The vista opens to the eye of faith, and the abiding places in the Father's house are seen afar.

O beloved, the larger vision is seen from this mountain top. The vision of the loved ones who wait for our com-

ing, the vision of the richer fellowship of the great and noble souls who have glorified the Christ of glory on the earth, and are about His throne in the heavenlies; the vision of the joy of the sinless life, with no touch or stain of sin upon the soul; and above all the unspeakable joy in the fellowship of the redeemed in ascribing endless praises to the Lord of our salvation, the ever-living Christ of God. This is the blessed life crowned forevermore. Would you know it at that great day? Then come and walk in it now.

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